

Sanitized - Approved For Release : CIA

Rigid NSA Regulation Bars Post To Naturalized, Disabled War Vet

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Staff Reporter

August Ponte, 43, a disabled Army veteran, learned recently that he is not eligible to be employed as a foreign language specialist by the top secret National Security Agency.

The reason: Ponte, who was brought to this country from his native Spain at the age of 6, is a naturalized rather than a native born American citizen.

Officials of the NSA at Ft. Meade said the Agency has a flat rule that all employees must be native born. Furthermore, the officials say, the parents and immediate family members of the employee also must be United States citizens.

The NSA makes no exceptions to this rule, it was asserted.

The NSA regulation came to light when Ponte received a 3-paragraph form letter informing him that he could not be considered for employment because of his naturalized citizen status.

Applicant's Background

Ponte, of 6111 Broad Branch rd. n.w., said he called the NSA for clarification and was told only: "We have our reasons."

He gave this description of his background:

Born in Sada, Spain, he came to the United States as a child when his widowed mother married an American citizen. About four years later, he obtained American citizenship when his mother was naturalized.

In World War II, he served with the Army in England for two years, receiving an honorable discharge for physical disability. The Veterans Administration confirmed that Ponte is carried on their records as having a permanent 10 per cent disability.

After the war, Ponte said, he worked at several jobs, including service as a representative in Europe for Inland Steel and as a translator for the Foreign Broadcast Intelligence Service of the Federal Communications Commission.

Earlier this year, Ponte said, he underwent surgery at the Mt. Alto Veterans Hospital that prevented him from working for three months. Upon his recovery, he answered an NSA newspaper advertisement for scientists and language specialists for the NSA.

The ad, he noted wryly, bore the notation: "An Equal Opportunity Employer."

What Prompted Rule

Ponte, who is unmarried, said he speaks Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and French and considers himself well qualified for the job. Beyond his citizenship status, he contended, there is nothing in his background that might make him a security risk.

NSA spokesmen said the native-born citizen rule was prompted by the agency's requirement that every employee submit to a background investigation dating back to his time of birth. In cases of foreign-born citizens, they continued, it often is difficult or too expensive to trace the periods of their lives spent abroad.

The spokesmen conceded that in the case of an individual such as Ponte, born in a friendly country and brought here when a child, these problems could be overcome without too much difficulty.

But, they pointed out, NSA regulations make no provision for considering applications from naturalized citizens on the basis of individual merit. Asked if the Secretary of Defense had approved the regulation, the spokesmen would say only that it "originated at a source higher than the Secretary."

The spokesmen also admitted that a number of other foreign born citizens have been refused employment by NSA. They could not estimate the number but, as one said, "It's happened enough times to warrant printing a form re-

lating the situation. It was one of those

In No Other Agencies

Woodrow Browne, assistant chief of the Federal Civil Service Personnel Investigation Bureau, said he did not know of any similar rules in Government departments whose employees are covered by civil service. The NSA, although a part of the Defense Department, is not governed by civil service regulations except in the case of a few clerical employees.

Browne said all Federal civil service employees must be American citizens. But, he added, no distinction is made between naturalized and native born.

He said the two Federal agencies under civil service that have the strictest security requirements are the Atomic Energy Commission and the Defense Department. Neither, he said, automatically disqualifies naturalized citizens from sensitive jobs.

Intelligence Agency, said their organization also has no ban on foreign born citizens. Naturalized Americans, they said, are checked very carefully before being hired by the CIA and a considerable number are employed at the agency.

Ponte Is Bewildered

Ponte, who said he still would like to get a job with the NSA, appeared bewildered by the situation. Said he:

"I would like to know if this means that the Government considers citizens who were born abroad to be classified as greater security risks than those who were born here."

If so, he would have some interesting company in this classification.

Under the NSA regulation, such foreign born citizens as the late Enrico Fermi, one of the signatories of the atomic bomb, and Albert Teller, father of the hydrogen bomb and winner of the Army's top honor, would be ineligible for employment in the department.

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